

French flies back to form

Piggy French wins the open intermediate at her first event for seven weeks, reports Rachel Wakefield

PIGGY French returned to top form when she won the open intermediate at Tweseldown on her father Wally French and Michael Underwood's mare Holly Blue Curtis.

"This was my first event for seven weeks. I hurt my ribs [in a fall with another horse] at Houghton and then everything else has been cancelled, so it was great to be back doing it," said Piggy.

"Holly Blue Curtis hasn't been out for ages and I'm really pleased with her dressage today, as she can get quite hot."

Not being a regular visitor to Tweseldown's twisty cross-country track, Piggy went on: "I was hoping I wouldn't get lost."

Piggy added nothing to her dressage score of 31. She was one of only two combinations all day to finish inside a tight optimum time on the cross-country, despite Mike Etherington-Smith's modifications to the course, which improved the flow of the track.

Just over four marks behind was Louisa Lockwood and The Diva, owned by Elizabeth Le Sueur, Donald Birts and Carol Seymour-Newton.

"The show jumping was causing

problems, but I'd rather be sat on her than a lot of other horses here today," said Louisa of The Diva.

Antoinette McKeown was third on Limerick X, who was having his first run since finishing 11th at Tattersalls CCI**.

Justin Clubleby had an expensive rail down to finish fourth with Marilyn Nash's Romany Campfire, while Austin O'Connor was fifth on Kate Jarvey's Memphis. He was the leader after show jumping on his dressage score of 25.2, but decided not to hurry round the cross-country.

"I was here just to build the horse's confidence after Tattersalls [where he fell] so I didn't rush. He's such a great jumper and was brilliant today," said Austin.

The other half of the French/Townend partnership was in full swing, with Oliver winning two out of three intermediate sections.

First, Oli produced a win in section P with Cynthia Priest's ODT Master Rose. This was a second intermediate win for the Master Imp seven-year-old.

"I'm really pleased, especially as his owner's over from America," said Oli. "Cynthia has five horses with me. She's over for three weeks

and this is the first time she's seen all the horses run."

They added just time-penalties to their dressage score to finish on a mark of 35.1, with Izzy Taylor 10 marks behind on Antartic Prince.

"I'm also really pleased with Divine Inspiration, whom I've only had for about a week," said Oli of his intermediate section O victory. "My father sold him as a youngster and I've just bought him back."

The reacquainted couple added 6.8 penalties to a dressage score of 30 and held off a strong challenge from Lucy Wiegiersma and The

Sandy Syndicate's French Leave, who finished second.

Mike Bennett's influential show jumping track tested the riders' commitment to riding positively early on. Most of the trouble was at the line of an oxer at fence three, five strides to a double, then three strides to an upright.

"I don't think plastic poles teach young horses to be very careful," said Oli. "I had five good rounds on my baby horses, but I wouldn't want to be jumping plastic poles week in week out."

The final intermediate section



Piggy French wins the OI on Holly Blue Curtis. The mare is by William Curtis, sire of Oli Townend's ride Flint Curtis

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Piggy French

Promising seven-year-old mare Bonza Moorabinda scores in an intermediate for Matt Ryan

